

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8332
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 3327

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PEPR, SY,LE
SUBJ: TISHRIIN EDITOR GIVES VIEW ON SOUTH LEBANON

1. IN TALK JUNE 8 WITH POLOFF, TISHRIIN EDITOR AMID AL-KHULI SAID THAT HE DID NOT EXPECT SYRIAN ADF FORCES TO MOVE TO THE LITANI NOR TO EXPAND THEIR AREA OF OPERATIONS BETWEEN THE ZAHRANI AND THE LITANI RIVERS. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE STATED THAT TYIRA GAVE THE HIGHEST PRIORITY TO ISRAEL'S WITHDRAWAL FROM SOUTH LEBANON AND WISHED LEBANESE ARMY FORCES TO PROCEED ACROSS THE LITANI AND MOVE RIGHT TO THE BORDER.

2. HE ASSERTED THAT SYRIA WOULD DO ALL IN ITS POWER TO
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SAFEGUARD THE LEBANESE ARMY'S LOGISTICAL AND COMMUNICATION LINES AND WOULD STRIKE AT ANY PALESTINIAN OR LEBANESE PARTY THAT INTERFERED IN THE EXTENSION OF LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY TO ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. NOTING THAT ARAFAT HAD MET WITH KHADDAM IN DAMASCUS ABOUT THIS SUBJECT EVEN BEFORE ASSAD AND SARKIS ENDED THEIR TALKS IN LATAKIA, KHULI CLAIMED THAT ARAFAT RECOGNIZED THAT IT WAS IN THE PALESTINIAN

INTEREST FOR LEBANON'S GOVERNMENT TO EXERCISE ITS AUTHORITY IN THIS AREA. ONCE THIS WAS DONE THE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN VILLAGERS WOULD HAVE NO FURTHER REASON TO CONTINUE CONTRACTS WITH THE ISRAELIS, ESPECIALLY IF THE PALESTINIANS DID NOT INTERFERE WITH THEM. WHEN POLOFF RAISED THE POSSIBILITY THAT PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS AND LEFTIST FATAH ELEMENTS MIGHT NOT OBEY ARAFAT, EVEN IF HE WERE INCLINED TO COOPERATE, KHULI BRUSHED THIS ASIDE CLAIMING THAT ARAFAT FOR REASONS OF CONVENIENCE FOSTERED THE IMAGE THAT HE WAS CONSTANTLY IN TROUBLE IN ORDER TO AVOID TAKING DECISIONS HE DID NOT FAVOR.

3. KHULI FELT THE PALESTINIANS SHOULD STRICTLY IMPLEMENT THEIR AGREEMENTS WITH THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AND NOT LAUNCH CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS FROM THE COUNTY. HE NOTED THAT ISRAEL'S OCCUPATION OF LEBANON HAD BEEN UNABLE TO PREVENT PALESTINIAN OPERATIONS INSIDE ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND PREDICTED THAT SUCH ACTIVITY WOULD CONTINUE.

4. HE TOOK A HARD LINE TOWARD LEBANESE OFFICERS HADDAD AND SHIDIAC, CLAIMING THAT NEITHER THE ISRAELIS NOR THE LEBANESE RIGHTISTS HAD THE RIGHT TO INTERFERE IN WHATEVER THE LEBANESE CENTRAL AUTHORITIES DECIDED TO DO WITH THEM.

5. KHULI, WHO ON THE DAY OF THE MEETING WROTE AN ANTI-US FRONT-PAGE EDITORIAL, SEEMED TO GIVE THE US SOME CREDIT
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FOR ASSISTING THE LEBANESE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT (AND IMPLICIT SYRIA). HOWEVER, AFTER NOTING THAT THE US WAS PUSHING ISRAEL TO EVACUATE SOUTH LEBANON AND URGING THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT TO REASSERT ITS AUTHORITY IN THE REGION, HE WRYLY REMARKED THAT IF THE US DID NOT TRY TO ENFORCE "ITS OWN UNSC RESOLUTION, THEN WHO WOULD."

6. COMMENT: KHULI IS SYRIA'S MOST AUTHORITATIVE JOURNALIST. SINCE IT IS HIS JOB TO SELL THE OFFICIAL LINE, HE OFTEN IS MORE OPTIMISTIC AND FORCEFUL IN HIS STATEMENTS THAN CONDITIONS WARRANT. THUS, IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT HE IS NOT PREDICTING ANY EXPANSION OF THE SYRIAN PRESENCE IN SOUTH LEBANON AT THIS TIME, THIS RAISES THE QUESTION HOW SYRIA CAN EXPECT TO PROTECT LEBANESE ARMY FORCES OTHER THAN THROUGH MORAL SUASION AND DIRECT PRESSURE OF ARAFAT.
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